

Reviving downtown Bryan

by BILL HUGHES

Downtown Bryan has been in a state of flux.

Some businesses are leaving for greener pastures in College Station, while other merchants see the downtown area as green pastures for their types of stores.

The big change has been the increasing number of businesses flowing into the downtown area, rather than out of it.

In the past, as the popula-

tion grew in College Station, merchants moved out of downtown Bryan to be closer to the larger consumer base south of Bryan.

But the trend reversed slightly in 1984 when 14 new businesses opened their doors downtown. Only four had opened in 1983.

The downtown revival effort is following a pattern described in "The Rebels of Retail," the cover story in the November 1985 issue of Inc.

magazine, in which small business owners pick marketing niches composed of people willing to go out of their way to reach places appealing to special interests.

The influx of new businesses includes stores appealing to artists and craftsmen, restaurants, designers, doctors, attorneys and other specialty merchants.

The revival is so young that until recently, there hadn't been a concentrated effort to get the various parties involved with downtown Bryan to coordinate their plans.

In 1983, Ed Latta, executive director of the Bryan Development Foundation, began meeting with downtown businesspeople. The foundation had been created by the city of Bryan to enhance the economic development of the community; Latta decided the downtown area needed some additional help from the foundation.

Latta felt that downtown Bryan could serve some needs that weren't being served elsewhere in the community, such as being an "in-

cubator" for new businesses that need to keep overhead low to make a go of it in their first and second years.

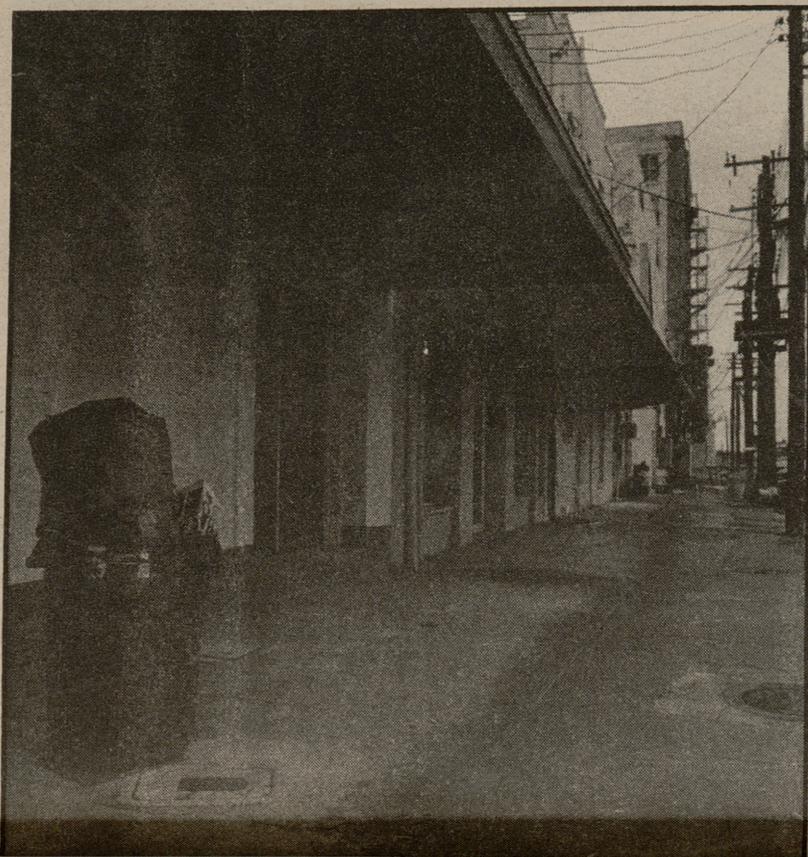
"What we've tried to accomplish is to create an atmosphere for growth downtown," he says. "We feel that we've marketed downtown to folks who are looking for some good structures to move into, folks who produce or offer something different than can be found in a mall."

In late 1983, the Bryan Downtowners Association was formed through Latta and the development foundation. The immediate goal was to improve the economic status of the downtown area.

The association began sponsoring festivals, such as Westfest and Heritage Days, to increase awareness about the downtown area. The festivals were successful, says Wendy Marshall, coordinator of the Bryan Downtowners Association, but a lot more needs to be done.

"The association has never provided the city with any kind of comprehensive plan about downtown," she says. "That kind of information is helpful for them in making any decisions."

Marshall, who's been on the job for four months, is in the midst of a reorganization effort that she hopes will



The revival effort in downtown Bryan is still young; it hasn't taken hold in the whole area. The facade for Donna's Ceramics has been redone (top photo), yet scenes like the one at left exist just around the corner

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